

Approach to effective clinical communication

Habit	Skills	Techniques and examples	Payoff
Invest in the beginning	Create rapport quickly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce self to everyone in the room • Acknowledge patient wait time, if appropriate • Convey knowledge of patient's history by commenting on prior visit or problem • Attend to patient's comfort • Make a social comment or ask a nonmedical question to put patient at ease • Adapt own language, pace, and posture in response to patient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes a welcoming atmosphere • Allows faster access to real reason for visit • Increases diagnostic accuracy • Requires less work • Minimizes "Oh, by the way..." at the end of visit • Facilitates negotiating an agenda • Decreases potential for conflict
	Elicit patient's concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with open-ended questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "What would you like help with today?" OR, - "I understand that you're here for... Could you tell me more about that?" - "What else?" • Speak directly with patient when using an interpreter 	
	Plan the visit with the patient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat concerns back to check understanding • Let patient know what to expect: "How about if we start with talking more about..., then I'll do an exam, and then we'll go over possible tests/ways to treat this? Sound OK?" • Prioritize when necessary: "Let's make sure we talk about X and Y. It sounds like you also want to make sure we cover Z. If we can't get to the other concerns, let's..." 	
Elicit the patient's perspective	Ask for patient's ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess patient's point of view: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "What do you think is causing your symptoms?" - "What worries you most about this problem?" • Ask about ideas from significant others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respects diversity • Allows patient to provide important diagnostic clues • Uncovers hidden concerns • Reveals use of alternative treatments or requests for tests • Improves diagnosis of depression and anxiety
	Elicit specific requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine patient's goal in seeking care: "When you've been thinking about this visit, how were you hoping I could help?" 	
	Explore the impact on the patient's life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check context: "How has the illness affected your daily activities/work/family?" 	
Demonstrate empathy	Be open to patient's emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess changes in body language and voice tone • Look for opportunities to use brief empathetic comments or gestures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds depth and meaning to the visit • Builds trust, leading to better diagnostic information, adherence, and outcomes • Makes limit-setting or saying "no" easier
	Make at least one empathetic statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name a likely emotion: "That sounds really upsetting." • Compliment patient on efforts to address problem 	
	Convey empathy nonverbally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a pause, touch, or facial expression 	
	Be aware of your own reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use own emotional response as a clue to what patient might be feeling • Take a brief break if necessary 	
Invest in the end	Deliver diagnostic information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame diagnosis in terms of patient's original concerns • Test patient's comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases potential for collaboration • Influences health outcomes • Improves adherence • Reduces return calls and visits • Encourages self care
	Provide education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain rationale for tests and treatments • Review possible side effects and expected course of recovery • Recommend lifestyle changes • Provide written materials and refer to other sources 	
	Involve patient in making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss treatment goals • Explore options, listening for the patient's preferences • Set limits respectfully: "I can understand how getting that test makes sense to you. From my point of view, since the results won't help us diagnose or treat your symptoms, I suggest we consider this instead." • Assess patient's ability and motivation to carry out plan 	
	Complete the visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for additional questions: "What questions do you have?" • Assess satisfaction: "Did you get what you needed?" • Reassure patient of ongoing care 	

Reproduced with permission from: Frankel RM, Stein T. Getting the most out of the clinical encounter: The Four Habits Model. *J Med Pract Manage* 2001; 16:184. Copyright ©2001 Greenbranch Publishing.

<http://www.mpmnetwork.com>

Graphic 69929 Version 2.0